A ritual demystified

A ritual demystified: the work of anti-wonder among Sufi reformists and traditionalists in a Macedonian Roma neighbourhood.

Abstract

The article describes how an iconic mystical Sufi ritual of body wounding, *zarf*, was stripped of its mystical credentials and conventional efficacy amidst tensions between Rifai reformists and traditionalists in a small Roma neighbourhood in Skopje, Macedonia. The death of a sorcerer and a funeral event-series set the scene for acts of "anti-wonder" (Tomlinson 2017) and demystification by the Rifai reformists. Despite the history of socialist secularism and inadvertently secularizing Islamic reforms in the region, demystification signalled not the loss of enchantment per se but a competition for legitimate forms of wonder. In addition to accounting for socio-historical context and relational forms of Islam, the real challenge is how to see a demystified ritual for its explicit intellectual capacity to stimulate speculation about itself.

Key words: demystification, anti-wonder, socialist secularism, Islamic reformism, *zarf,* Rifai Sufism, Macedonia

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In the period between summer 2007 and summer 2010, I worked with dervishes, members of the Rifai and Sadi Sufi orders that form a vestige of the Ottoman heritage in the now independent nation-state of Northern Macedonia. Although not organized into a single national or transnational network, the male-dominated Rifai order is recognizable worldwide for physically and spiritually demanding rituals of remembering Allah (dhikr, or *zikir* in Macedonian) that involve long prayers and sometimes self-wounding with skewers, spikes, and sword blades, simply called *zarf,* or piercing with a spike (in Macedonian, *bockanje so zarf*). When I arrived, a loosely formed urban community of ethnically Roma dervishes was split into traditionalists and reformists, bickering over who practised Sufism "correctly". I reify the factions somewhat because some people oscillated between reformist aspirations and sympathy for traditional ways. Nevertheless, *zarf* was conceived as an iconic mystical ritual by the Rifai traditionalists and a ritual abomination by the scripturally minded Rifai reformists, respectively. As a normative expectation, the former saw the multi-purpose ritual of *zarf* as the site for approximating the divine, the test of participants' spiritual virtue and ritual competences, and a production floor of wonder. For the latter, the ritual was a target for iconoclasm and anti-wonder, something that had to be demystified and exposed as nothing more than a skilful manipulation of metal skewers and properties of human flesh.

The essay tells a story of demystification of a *zarf* ritual that took place in the conclusion of a controversial funeral of a locally despised Sufi sorcerer (*djindjia*). On that occasion, a

mixed audience of mainly reformists and some rival traditionalists was so unremittingly hostile to the deceased and his family that mystical enchantment and ritual efficacy of *zarf* were refused from the start. This case was not anomalous as it encapsulated an environment of ritual iconoclasm, demystification, and "anti-wonder" (Tomlinson 2017), precipitated by a configuration of socialist secularism and dogmatic Islamic theologies over the last hundred years of Macedonian history. Nevertheless, I would like to eschew causal explanations by 'socialist modernity' because an effort to ascertain the impact of socialist secularism would regurgitate studies of official Yugoslav narrative about the inevitable demise of religion and counterexamples of religious resilience under socialism. My intention here is to acknowledge socialist secularism as a historico-conceptual optic but to concentrate on the work of anti-wonder intrinsic to religious encounters. Even more specifically, I focus on one aspect of anti-wonder, namely, demystification of a ritual practice, to illuminate the entangled premises and practices of the schism between reformists and traditionalists in Islam that tend to be glossed as the antagonism between scholarly and popular Islam. This presents me with an analytical challenge of figuring out the value of a 'demystified mystical' ritual, so to speak.

Below, I will provide extensive ethnographic content to the work of anti-wonder of *zarf* that I observed in urban Macedonia. In the conclusion, I would like to consider the theoretical implications of this primarily descriptive paper. I do so through a vocabulary of disenchantment, wonder, anti-wonder, and demystification. I suggest that demystification of *zarf* among Roma Rifai reformists divested it of legitimacy, meaning and efficacy. Furthermore, the work of anti-wonder and demystification laid bare what was obfuscated, and initiated a context for thinking about the value of ritual. My thesis is that demystification had recast *zarf* from a mystical Sufi ritual of body-wounding into a non-sign that mediated reflection rather than ritual efficacy in a conventional sense of self-cultivation or power relations. The article develops this idea.

Narratives and spaces of wonder

Fifteen years after the official demise of "socialist secularism"[i] (Ballinger and Ghodsee 2011), Rifai dervishes in a Roma neighbourhood in Skopje experienced wonder in two different registers: narrative and spatial. The Qur'an, the works and deeds of the Prophet Muhammed and Sufi hagiographies contain numerous textual examples of the wondrous and the miraculous. The dervishes talked about awe-inspiring properties and unthinkable powers of Allah that defied habitual imaginaries. My interlocutors marvelled at the Prophet's Miraculous Journey (*Miraj*) to Jerusalem and to Heaven. They regaled each other with feel-good moral tales about small miracles of exemplary Muslims and crafty Sufis. They yearned to experience the stories, to see them come to life in their dreams, to taste the Prophet's favourite food, and to be granted an experience of levitation in prayer.

The dark side of wonder teemed with horny sinister djinn spirits who sat inside the loo to peep at women and penetrate their bodies. Strange sour stench in toilets was one of the tangible signs of their presence. Some dervishes and shaykhs spoke of encounters with she-demons with gaping mouths ready to devour them during exorcism. The narrative repertoire of malicious beings was replenished with tropes, iconographies, plot lines and clichés borrowed from popular culture, especially Turkish horror films that circulated on pirate DVDs and attracted considerable crowds for home viewings. Invariably called "documentaries" (*dokumentarac*), horror films' plots were personalized or incorporated as morality tales into Friday sermons.

In addition to texts and films, some spaces were infused with wonder. For example, I was admonished not to walk across a desolate street market after dark. A vibrant, noisy, colourful place during the day, the street market became a dangerous filthy playground of

scavenging spirits, drunk humans, old newspapers, and stray dogs that looked like stones in the moonlight until their shadows unfurled and snapped at my ankles.

More, the reformists' wondrous discourses were tinged with a sense of loss. The past tense ('used to') was a common speech pattern during my research: people used to have wondrous experiences, people used to have palpable and meaningful dreams, magic used to work. They used to hear Sufis chanting in an abandoned Sufi lodge. People used to see a woman in an Ottoman-style dress hoist her skirts and wee of a lamppost above an ancient gravestone by a mini-market.

Those who remembered the ritual intensities of the olden days speculated if wonder dried out because ancient shaykhs buried in concrete tombs had moved out of their graves, disappointed with people's neglect of ritual obligations and indifference to the fate of their religion. 'The Turks' cared about their shaykhs, I was told, but the mass migration of ethnic Turks and Turkish speakers from the Balkans in the first half of the 20th century depopulated mosques and especially Sufi lodges. 'The Turks' might have taken 'true' Sufism and wonder with them.

Apart from nostalgia, there were many reasons to tell miraculous or terrifying stories tongue-in-cheek in order to distance oneself from an experience of wonder. First, to admit faith in Sufi magic was to invite mockery (Mazower 2000:66). In an ethnically diverse yet divided Macedonia, many of my informants felt self-conscious about their ethnic "Gypsiness"[ii] commonly associated with superstition and theological ignorance. Thus, narratives and spaces of wonder mediated not only historical consciousness but also ontological categories of presumed superior and inferior human beings (Stasch 2016).

Second, the 20th century historicism, in its late-Ottoman and Yugoslav forms, has been successful in obscuring and ridiculing "tales of the marvellous" in pursuit of historical 'facts'

(Sahlins 2012:131). Ottoman historical records documented how people shared sovereignty (Bond and Timmer 2017:136) not only with each other but also with divine and satanic forces, spirits, animals and animated objects that co-inhabited cities, shrines, cemeteries, mountains and roads (Mazower 2000). In the 19th century, vampires threatened Christians and Muslims on dangerous mountain roads (Mazower 2000:66). Until recently, witches and neighbours prowled the streets after dark, trying to climb over tall brick walls in Macedonian villages (Rheubottom 1985). In the island Greece, icons are still known to possess the agency to hide from church fires and human conflict and subsequently make known their presence in dreams (Stewart 2012). Far from exoticizing and orientalising the Balkans, such narratives violate a linear 'rationalizing' order of historicism and constitute an alternative "topological" history (Stewart 2017:129) that restores Balkan "wondrous geography" (Bond and Timmer 2017:137).

Finally, awkwardness about the reality of spirits and mystical experiences among my informants was intensified by experiences of Yugoslav socialist secularism, a topic that did not receive due attention in anthropology. Yugoslav socialist secularism promoted urbanization, modernization, enlightenment and uplifting from religious backwardness, frequently targeting women, especially minority women (Ballinger and Ghodsee 2011). Thus, despite being more liberal than in other communist countries of Eastern Europe, the official Yugoslav ideology postulated that diverse religions of Yugoslavia would wither away on their own accord while the 1946 Yugoslav constitution (and its amendments in 1963 and 1974) enshrined the separation between the state and the church and equal treatment of the faithful and atheists (Ramsak 2015; Brocic 1975:355). Further liberalization of the non-aligned Communist regime in Yugoslavia in the 1960s restored some autonomy to religious organizations (Ognjenovic and Jozelic 2014) and patched up the diplomatic relations with the Vatican (Ramsak 2015). In the 1970s, some Macedonian Muslims received fellowships to study Islamic theology and history

at Al Azhar University in Cairo. Others worked in construction and engineering in places like Iraq, where they visited mosques and interacted with local Islamic scholars and leaders.

At the same time, the imperative to secularise and modernise in the federative Yugoslavia concealed numerous power-struggles for autocephaly, recognition, and authority among ethno-national and religious institutions, for example, between ethno-national orthodox churches and between different Islamic organizations. For instance, in socialist Yugoslavia, the Serbian Orthodox Church engaged in virulent polemics against the Jehovah's Witnesses (Brocic 1975:359) and refused to recognize the communist-sponsored Macedonian Orthodox Church[iii] (Pettifer 2008). Paradoxically, socialist disdain for organized religion permitted greater religious freedom in unregulated spaces of everyday religiosities (Pelkmans 2014). In contrast, the end of socialism in the early 1990s consolidated the regional influence of some conservative forms of Islamic faith, like Wahhabi and Salafi movements.

To recapitulate, narratives and spaces of wonder among the Rifai reformists and traditionalists did not disappear in the course of the 20th century disenchantment by socialist secularism but they became an embarrassment. Inspired by new theologies, many reformed Rifai dervishes longed for yet feared the return of wonder (Hojer 2009). Any experience of wonder could signal an illusion, Satan's machinations to lead the dervishes astray from the righteous path of 'true' Islam. As Michael Scott argues the discourses of wonder contradicted the dominant assumptions of modernist religiosities and caused disillusionment (Scott 2016:489).

Islamic reformism and ritual iconoclasm

In the Balkans, the tensions between Islamic modernizers/reformists and traditionalists go back to the 19th century Ottoman Tanzimat reforms, including political and fiscal modernization (Amzi-Erdocgdular 2017). Islamic religious education was marked off as a

separate subject in order to make religious seminaries (*medresa*) more compatible with modernity. The intention was to revitalize Islamic communities but the end result was an unanticipated secularization of Muslims (on Russia, see Tuna 2011; Amzi-Erdocgdular 2017). In the post-Ottoman and Yugoslav periods, reformist Muslim elites in the Balkans frequently portrayed traditional religious leaders as backward (Katsikas 2009). For example, when an independent association of dervish orders was formed in Kosovo in the 1970s (Popović 1994: 17), the official Islamic Organization in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) attempted to clamp down on Sufi orders and dervishes in Kosovo to consolidate its monopoly over religious matters in 1952 (Algar 1971: 196-197; Duijzings 2000: 112-120).

Despite the inadvertent secularization through Islamic reforms, the reformed Rifai I met continued to say Qur'anic incantations before setting off on a journey and to protect their children from the evil eye on the way to school. Nevertheless, some practices, like *zarf,* divination on water in an enamel bowl, marriage magic, sales of enchanted water and towels, djinn exorcism, were banned for lack of mention in the Quran. Although many reformers participated in zarf rituals as children, they disapproved of the practice in their thirties. Instead, they placed a great premium on by-rote memorizing and in-depth knowledge of the Qur'an and the Prophet's deeds.

In many contexts of lived Islam, anti-wonder operates at the nexus between scriptural Islam and 'popular' Islam that frequently appropriates, or at least derives, its mystical and magical practices from local Sufi orders. Scriptural Islam comes across as a modernizing and purifying force that seeks to rid Islam of accrued heresies and 'backward' practices and 'peasant' beliefs (Gilsenan 1999:601). It appeals to notions of scriptural authority, truth and evidence (Gilsenan 1999:604; Starrett 1998). It moralizes popular Islam for its recourse to the ludic, the obscene, the playful, and the incongruous (Gilsenan 1999:607). Sufis are frequently portrayed as spiritual drunks, irreverent tricksters, madmen, miracle workers, dreamers, snake

charmers, mendicants, poets and peripatetic scholars. Thus, popular Islam, often embodied by Sufi orders, has been confined to "the shadow side of the modern state, and the embodiment of all those 'magical' impurities that reformists and radicals have attempted to purge from the body religious" (Gilsenan 1999: 612). At the same time, one cannot disregard reformist Neo-Sufis in ethnographies of Islam, who advocate for strict adherence to *shari'at* prescriptions, rejection of ecstatic practices, suspicion of innovations, importance of education and "rational interpretations of Islam" (Howell and van Bruinessen 2007: 10-11; Silverstein 2005).

The dichotomy between scriptural and popular Islam is underpinned by a flawed distinction between 'religion' and 'magic' and the modernist emphasis on scientific positivism (Eneborg 2014). Crucially, the dichotomy implies a kind of Weberian teleology of rationalization and disenchantment which is an inadequate framework for historicizing Islam not because Islam is essentially 'backward' but because of the specificity of Islamic debates about legitimate and illegitimate forms of wonder. To recap, I suggest that legitimacy of forms of wonder rather that disenchantment was at the heart of the antagonism between the reformist and traditionalist Rifai Muslims in Skopje.

Baba Muarif

In a maze of whitewashed bungalows and fences, Baba Muarif's house was avoided as a dwelling of one of the few remaining students of the dead sorcerer Servizovski (*djinjiya)*. It was rumoured that Servizovski knew tantalizing Sufi magic that had been transmitted to Baba Muarif. The family was detested for their sorcery. The elder son was known for hypnotizing and seducing faithful wives and swindling their husbands of money and honour. Also, Baba Muarif's younger son was openly gay, a highly reprobate act in the homophobic environment of my fieldwork.

One February evening I was watching TV with my host family, when the father, Karim, suddenly told his son to take me to Muarif's house. His wife protested meekly, while his adventurous teenage son put on his shoes in a heartbeat. When we knocked on Baba Muarif's door, a very old, almost translucent woman opened the door and ushered us into a tiny room, separated from the kitchen by a clean tattered curtain. There was no TV, which was strange because in other homes, TV generated a perpetual background noise, intermittently broadcasting pop music, Turkish soaps, and Islamic prayers.

Baba Muarif was reclining on a pile of cushions on the carpeted floor. As a formidable sorcerer, Baba Muarif looked the part. He had a floating beard and long hair, arranged in a high bun. His face was grey and fragile like parchment, covered in large brown moles. Tobacco permanently stained his long fingers.

Baba Muarif was born in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia. His mother was a local woman, but his father was a refugee from an unknown plight in Aleppo, then in the Ottoman Empire. His mother was very beautiful, but his father had dark skin, not a flattering appearance in Baba Muarif's opinion. Baba Muarif declared himself a Turk but, self-identified as a Rom. When he was younger, he had no personal experience of Allah. He was preoccupied with this world (*dunyaluk*), money, and sex. When he turned 25, he sensed something wondrous. One day he realized that he could will things to happen. It could be a simple business transaction at a street market. He would close his eyes and something like a television screen would switch on in front of his closed eyes. He would visualise future events and they would come true.

Since then, he started praying regularly. He would tidy his room, put fragrant drops of perfume everywhere and get dresses as if he was expecting a guest. Then, he would lock the room from the inside. He would switch the light off and start praying with a string of

beads. Suddenly, he would see a man sitting to his left, and another man sitting in front of him, and then another man to his right. They would pray together.

Baba Muarif scornfully described theological literacy of the reformists as 'school-ish' (*skolski*). His religiosity consisted of solitary prayers, rituals, and bodily cleanliness that promised but could not guarantee the presence of invisible emissaries of God. For him, ritual was a necessity. Even, the existence of Allah was irrelevant to the requirements of ritual life. Baba Muarif continued:

"We do not know if Allah exists. We live as if he exists. Even if Allah does not exist, we continue to believe. God is invisible. Even if something is invisible, it can still be there. For example, you cannot see the whole material world, but you know it is there. Allah does not do good or evil. Allah does not interfere into this world. He is busy with his own work. If something happens, you are responsible…This is how it works with Allah."

When my teenage guide and I had finally left Baba Muarif's house, my phone registered a dozen missed calls from the boy's mother. My host family looked sour when we entered. The next morning the father complained of nightmares. Karim felt "psychically dirty" and nipped to the bathroom. We heard splashing and swearing for a good half an hour until he re-emerged in better spirits. My visit to Baba Muarif seemed to have provoked an experience of pollution, even defilement. The shower did not wash it off entirely, so the father decided to go to a Sufi lodge to attend a prayer meeting and a sermon. "You haven't prayed for weeks", jabbed his wife as the front door slammed in her face.

The funeral: day one

A few days later, I bought Baba Muarif some tea biscuits and cheap cigarettes. While I was waiting for my teenage guide to finish a skype conversation with his girlfriend

in Italy, someone banged on the window with the deafening “the devil died at night”. The neighbourhood cheered at the news and flocked to the sorcerer’s house.

Baba Muarif’s funeral was organized by his younger son, Meri Baba. Meri Baba was proud of his Sufi ‘pedigree’ as a shaykh going back twenty generations, in his words. Various certificates confirmed that Meri Baba had taken a shaykh exam at a well-known Rifai lodge in Mitrovica, Kosovo. Now, Meri Baba was qualified to perform magic, to initiate dervishes, and conduct other dervish rituals including five daily prayers, ablutions, and a dervish prayer, *zikir*. Similar certificates were sold to all and sundry by local and Kosovo shaykhs who benefited from this spiritual economy.

On the day of Baba Muarif’s death, I was sitting on a wooden bench in his prayer hall (*semana*), looking at the shaykh’s corpse. Calligraphic posters and old photographs festooned the green walls. The *mihrab* niche was decorated with *zarf* spikes, skewers, swords, and daggers, polished to a deep glow of clean metal. They were used in contrast to rusty trinkets I saw in other homes. The room was crowded. The reformists sat next to traditionalists. There were a few Albanian Muslims. Almost everybody was smoking and the air was fusty and oppressive.

“Funerals”, my host father explained, “are to be organized swiftly. The body should be buried on the day of death”. Some twelve hours after Baba Muarif’s death, his corpse was still in the *semana*, placed on an old mattress parallel to a prayer niche, *mihrab*. At the head of the corpse there was a turban, a plain tube of white wool. A red string of prayer beads was placed on top. Three ribbons were thrown over the corpse: black, red and vibrant green. Karim whispered: “Each colour has a meaning. Black means death. Red stands for a transition from a material to spiritual being. Green means freedom and liberation from what is material”.

The people talked quietly, exchanged the latest news, challenged each other to translate Arabic words or define Sufi concepts. To my left, separated from me by a few men, two men were looking at me with undisguised curiosity. One of them was very pale. His left ear was missing; the spot scarified. He was dressed casually in a denim jacket. Karim introduced them as two well-known traditionalist shaykhs. One leaned forward and asked me if I knew the definition of Sufism. I quoted a prosaic local definition of Sufism as Islamic spirituality (*duhovnost vo Islam*), but they didn't look impressed. The other shaykh, Ahmed, launched into a monologue about different types of knowledge, knowledge from the mind and knowledge from the heart. The heart contained invisible (*nevidlivi*) thoughts, while the thoughts of the mind could be articulated. Allah created a division between physical metaphysical worlds. Sufis are interested in the metaphysical world. Shaykh Ahmed went on:

"When Muhammed traveled to Miraj, how did he do that? With his perishable body? Only the soul is long-lasting (*dusha e trajna*). Matter is nothing; the heart doesn't host Allah. If you get to the point where you can diminish the physical, then you become an absolute being (*absolutno postojanje*). There is a difference between survival and being (*opstojuvanje and postojanje*); being (*postojanje*) comes after the self is extinguished (*fena*). Then it is possible to learn Allah's agency (*Allahovoto deluvanje*). The question is where is your will? The all knowing depends on the omniscient (*seznajen zavisi ot vseznajen*). Allah has high will (*visoka volja*), but we have only low will (*nizka volja*). What does Allah possess? What sort of knowledge? *Malimat* is primordial and post-primordial knowledge (*preiskonski and posleiskonski*)".

The incomprehensible monologue was intended to exemplify Sufi wisdom. It was interrupted when a very old man fainted in the stifling room, which caused a great commotion. He was revived and propped against the wall by an open window. To conclude the first day of the funeral, the son of the deceased shaykh, Meri Baba, served meat pies and buttermilk in

plastic glasses. It was midnight. We ate the pies, looking at the corpse. Meri Baba's dervishes tidied up. I nodded off, woke up, and made my excuses to leave.

The funeral: day two

In the morning, I found out that the moment I left, Baba Muarif's elder son, Baba Fethula, arrived. Baba Fethula was probably the most notorious sorcerer in the neighborhood. He came after midnight and instantly clashed with a reformist over the value of five daily prayers. Baba Fethula argued that prayer was only a technology for strengthening faith (*iman*). Baba Fethula boasted that his faith was so advanced he could perform a miracle. He experienced Sufi self-extinguishment (*fena*), a proxy to death. Baba Fethula shouted that he could take his body on and off like a coat. He could die and come back to life whenever he wanted. Apparently, no one spoke after Baba Fethula's tirade, which ended day one of the funeral on a somewhat irate note.

I decided not to chance another missed ethnographic opportunity and I went to Baba Muarif's home straightaway. Outside his father's house, Meri Baba rustled up a tent out of old curtains and bed linen to conceal his father's body. Through the gaps, I saw a wooden desk on which the body was washed. Water rolled from the corpse and trickled along the cracks of the asphalt and down the drain. An anonymous voice mumbled in my ear that the funeral water of a sorcerer could be used in black magic. Nobody tried to collect it. Baba Muarif's clean corpse was wrapped in a sparkling white shroud and placed in a closed green casket. A few men prayed over it. A large group of spectators loitered along the narrow street.

Four pallbearers squatted around the coffin and finished a *fatiha* prayer. Meri Baba yelped "*Tekbir! Allahu ekber!*" and the coffin was lifted on wooden sticks and carried down the street. Meri Baba and his male relatives stomped behind the coffin and chanted "*Allaaaahu ekber, allaaaahu ekber*". The crowd gave way and joined the procession. A

couple of women, mostly neighbours, standing on the terraces of their house started wailing. The coffin sailed through the labyrinth of the Roma neighbourhood into the main street next to the *tekke* of the reformer, Baba Mehmed.

Baba Mehmed

An outspoken critic of the family and a great reformer, Baba Mehmed stood on the steps of his lodge, watching in disapproval. His lodge was the spiritual node of the neighbourhood because it had a vaulted crypt with several tombs of ancestral shaykhs. Passers-by could slip a few coins through a tiny window to make a wish. Earlier, one could order a prayer from Baba Mehmed or leave a t-shirt or a bottle of water overnight to charge with the dead shaykhs' spiritual energy. Baba Mehmed terminated the latter two customs but pragmatically kept the tiny window open to generate a small income and buy Islamic books.

When Baba Muarif died, Baba Mehmed did not let the sorcerer's body inside his lodge. The shaykh and his reformist dervishes agreed to deny the final prayer to Baba Muarif, which subsequently aggravated the tensions between the reformists and the traditionalists in the neighborhood.

Whether out of spite or any other reason – the meaning of the gesture was ambiguous - Meri Baba stopped outside Shaykh Mehmed's lodge. Clutching two metal plates, he started banging them forcefully and shouting "*hu, hu, hu*" in the air. Meri Baba's dervishes turned the coffin around and lifted the lid so that the deceased could face the tombs. Then, the coffin vanished in a hired hearse. A minute later, a ramshackle old bus pulled over to collect the rest of the men and drove them off to the cemetery.

As a woman, I could not join, so I stayed with Shaykh Mehmed. Livid, he called the whole ceremony "a circus". It was not a 'true' Islamic funeral at all. The appalling

screaming! The turning of Baba Muarif to face the tombs was a disgrace! Later, Shaykh Mehmed explained to me how a Muslim funeral (*djenaze*) "ought to be" conducted and how no personal symbolism was allowed. From his notes, he read the instructions about when and how to pray, when to wash the dead, who should do it, how a family should not cook for seven days. Baba Mehmed fumed:

"What are we doing? We do not follow the Prophet…everything is prescribed (*propisano*), nothing can be changed, whoever you are a shaykh or a saint. Fools! …When do you pray during a funeral? Do you keep the dead body at home? No, as fast as possible you carry the body to its burial spot, to the grave … you do not eat pies over a dead body… Why did they put Muarif with his right hand toward Kaaba in Mecca? One should sleep with one's right hand to Kaaba, houses should be arranged in that direction…Who has ever heard of putting prayer beads and ribbons over the dead body?"

Seven days later

Seven days after the burial (a temporal mark I associated with the Orthodox Christian vigil) the neighborhood brimmed with rumors that Meri Baba was planning a *zarf* ritual. I was permitted to look through the window together with a bunch of jostling and shouting children who could observe an allegedly secret dervish ritual without any restrictions.

Inside the prayer hall, Meri Baba sat next to the mihrab, newly redecorated with a red banner (*sandjak*) and two crossed spears. He wore a red shirt, a thick leather belt, some beige robes, and a beige turban. His brother, the sorcerer, squatted to his left. Clad in identical green robes and white turbans with an embroidered top, Meri Baba's dervishes were on their knees facing the shaykh.

First, Meri Baba's dervishes did a *zikir*, singing hymns and sharply exhaling air (*kalb*). The mixed audience of reformists and traditionalists did not join in. The singing built up

intensity, then suddenly stopped. Sorcerer Fazli read an *esma* prayer in a peculiar nasal voice and stepped outside slipping on mud next to me. He noticed me, greeted me and told me to get in. I did and sat at first by the door, then moved closer to the front row, next my host father and the reformer-dervishes.

Food was served swiftly by Meri Baba's dervishes. They spread two sheets and put plastic plates with burgers (*pleskavica*), potatoes, and salad on them. The guests ate fast. Then, we sat in silence for a bit.

I thought that there would be no *zarf* because the guests finished their food and got up to leave. When the plates and leftovers were cleared, Meri Baba's dervishes sang many hymns that glorified Meri Baba as a successor of Baba Muarif. They got up and started spinning in the middle of the room but the sorcerer, Baba Fethula, rearranged their formation by intertwining their arms. Not used to this style of dancing, the dervishes stepped on each other's feet, stumbled and smiled miserably at each other. Meri Baba got up and instructed his dervishes to form a semi-circle in front of him.

First, Meri Baba took a bifurcated sword. He held a piece of cloth in his left hand and stepped on the other end with his left foot. He ran the sword along the cloth and the piece of stripy fabric was cut in two. Meri Baba told one of his dervishes to lie down on his back roll up the man's shirt to bare a skinny stomach. The drums started beating; Meri Baba's dervishes resumed singing. Meri Baba took the sword and pressed it against the dervish's stomach for a few seconds. Then, he lifted the sword, licked his fingers and ran them over a line left on the stomach. The dervish got up and sat next to me. He rubbed his stomach apprehensively. The sword grazed the skin that probably felt sore.

Next, Meri Baba faced the mihrab and put the bifurcated sword in his mouth. He did not push it through the skin. Instead, he walked around the room with the sword in his mouth,

rolling his eyes. Meri Baba chose a zarf from a collection of spikes hanging on the nails in the mihrab. He gave two to his dervishes. The dervishes span the spikes counterclockwise above their heads. They gyrated around the room. The drums beat steadily. Meri Baba took a large spike, licked it and pressed it against his stomach but did not pierce the flesh. There was no response from the audience.

Meri Baba selected one dervish and then examined the collection of zarfs in the mihrab again. He picked a skewer, approached the dervish and pulled the skin around his Adam's apple with two fingers. The zarf went through the skin smoothly; when it was removed there was no blood. Meri Baba kissed the dervish who looked proud. Then, Meri Baba gave the permission to two dervishes to choose their zarf. The two men licked their zarfs and dropped on their knees. Meri Baba pushed the zarf through their left cheeks. Meri Baba had a difficulty with one zarf. The dervish's skin resisted; I could see how the sharp point of the zarf was looking for the way to puncture the flesh. The skin welled up a little in the middle of the cheek and the zarf emerged through the cheek. The dervish pushed it a bit further, got up, and started walking around the room. The audience clapped.

The dervishes removed the zarfs and blood squirted from their wounds. One of them kept licking his fingers and pressing them against the wound to stave off the flow. Another bled profusely and looked agitated. The drums stopped abruptly. The men in the audiences started talking to each other about the bleeding while my host father stood up and loudly explained how to do it more "skillfully (*iskusno*)" next time: "You have to keep the skewers embedded in the flesh for longer, to make sure that the body reacts and builds white cells around the wound. You won't bleed then". Some ten minutes later, we walked back home.

Disenchantment, wonder, anti-wonder and demystification

I have argued in the beginning that the Rifai reform among Roma Muslims in Skopje was inspired by the historical impetus to rationalize and modernize one's religion that stemmed from both socialist secularism and internal Islamic reforms. However, my key point has been that those historical developments did not lead to a kind of Weberian disenchantment. On the contrary, I have used a lengthy description to reconstruct the experiential sway of wondrous stories and places in both traditionalist and reformed Rifai imaginaries.

However, I find utility in differentiating disenchantment as a historico-conceptual optic from anti-wonder as a concrete iconoclastic practice. Weber's theory of modernity suggests that a long process of disenchantment encapsulates a historical propensity toward rendering human experience less mysterious and more dependent on human agency and scientific rationality (Weber 1958[1918]; Jenkins 2000:12). Disenchantment spells the end of magic and ascendance of instrumentality as a means-ends rationality that has relinquished the relations of reciprocity with gods (Karatani 2017). Many scholars have remonstrated against the teleology of disenchantment because it has been met with "oppositional (re)enchantments" (Jenkins 2000:12), including not only newly founded and rejuvenated religiosities but also technology and science (Bailey 2005; Fuller 2013); art (Gell 1998); sports (Numerato 2009); and capitalist economies (Pedersen 2011; Rudnyckyj 2010).

Recently, Michael Scott (2016) has reiterated the idea of tenaciousness of enchantment in some parts of the world. For him, wonder differs from grand narratives of disechantment because it constitutes a concrete affective mood like awe, marvel, astonishment, dread and perplexity. The utility of wonder is that it makes us question taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes the realm of possibility (Scott 2016:475), for example, a possibility of encounters with extraordinary beings, atypical events, and even wild animals (Hall 2017). Certainly, the extraordinary and the ordinary, the wonderous and the mundane, can be simultaneous as becomes clear from Morgan Clarke's ethnography of the Rifai Sufis in

Lebanon (Clarke 2014:407). Nonetheless, Scott' accent on radical alterity of wonder as a disturbance of religious and secular conventions underscores the significance of irruption of the spiritual in the secular everyday (Orsi 2006; Bubandt and van Beek 2014).

In sum, wonder discourses refute a frankly implausible claim of total disenchantment. However, what is *anti-wonder* (Tomlinson 2017)? Is it synonymous with disenchantment? In my reading, the answer is 'no'. Matt Tomlinson (2017) develops a notion of anti-wonder in the context of missionary encounters between Protestant Christianity and religious traditions in Oceania. Those encounters were premised on iconoclastic actions against local rituals and divinities to assert the authority of the Christian god (ibid.:169). In contrast to partially successful erasure of religiosities during politically driven militant secularization and iconoclasm in Soviet Russia (Peris 1998; Luehrmann 2015), anti-wonder in Oceania entailed a concrete work of displacement of one regime of religious wonder with another. Thus, despite morphological opposition, anti-wonder is not an antipode of wonder because they are not mutually exclusive.

Analysis

During the funeral events, anti-wonder was manifest in embarrassment about participation in now discredited ritual practices and a concomitant demystification of the iconic ritual of body-wounding, *zarf*, as nothing but a skill. The work of reformist anti-wonder during the funeral events denied *zarf* its original meaning of a mystical trial of one's virtue and negated its efficacy. In contrast to mystical imperatives for semantic opaqueness of language (flaunted by shaykh Ahmed) and their efforts to downplay human agency in prayer, the reformists' anti-wonder reduced the acts of ritual production to mere manipulation of metal spikes and human flesh. Nevertheless, it did not connote disenchantment in a Weberian sense.

The work of anti-wonder raises another important question. What is the utility of a ritual demystified when a ritual becomes unproductive and its conventional efficacy is eclipsed? Here lies an opportunity to make a general argument against a commonplace understanding of ritual through its efficacy. In anthropological scholarship, *ritual* features as a means to either/or maintaining or challenging power relations; shaping and disciplining human subjects; and indexing and materializing transcendental realms beyond the empirical reality. Alternatively, a ritual has been studied through a lens of its recursive and self-reflexive capacity of a ritual to manifest its own already-present internal logic (Espirito Santo 2016: 40). This meta-understanding is achieved by bracketing the socio-political outside of a ritual in order to underscore its internal logic (Shapiro 2015). Building on this scholarship, I focus not so much on a ritual event-series as a productive or faltering performance but on acts of anti-wonder that suspends ritual efficacy.

An act of anti-wonder, that is demystification of *zarf* by Rifai reformists, shifted people's attention from a metaphysic of relating to and indexing the unseen through ritual action to gesturing towards the ritual itself. Remarkably, this entailed exposure of human craft because a regime of demystification depends upon ritual "bareness, its having been pared of all obfuscating and illusory excess" (Meltzer 2013:173). A different context where demystification of the production process is privileged over the product's efficacy or author's intentions is performance-based conceptual art. Here, facts of production (what people do, the production context, and manipulation and properties of the medium) matter more than the final product (an artwork) and aesthetic appreciation by the audience (Davies 2004:x). Art theory supplants efficacy and appreciation because there cannot be a consensus on meaning and anticipated effects. There is no disclosure of artistic intention because properties and techniques specify only the parameters of an activity itself rather than its eventual interpretation (Davies 2004:83).

This art form (more accurately, its plural forms) tends to dismiss the notion of aesthetic appreciation while it lays bare the structures of artwork to generate a context for reflecting on itself. In contradistinction with artwork as artefacts that might possess their own agentive force (Thomas 2001), performance-based conceptual art is premised on actions of a performer who emplaces his or her body into a performative setting to initiate an analytical thought. This way, performance-based conceptual art gives a material form to an idea (Osborne 2002), questions the act of representation, signification and definition from outside, and asks questions about itself (Osborne 2002:14). In other words, it sets in motion "a conceptual machinery" (Davies 2004:x) and initiates an activity that investigates a particular idea (Laffan, Hodson, and Laffan 2014). To rephrase, performance-based conceptual art concerns itself with the nature of art itself; it is a simultaneously visceral and conceptual metacommentary on the production of art. As such, it possesses a capacity for self-reflectivity and self-criticality as well as institutional critique (Meltzer 2013:7, 9). In a nutshell, it generates a non-sign that does not signify, in order to render different formal, ideological, socio-historical registers of a problem visible (Meltzer 2013).

To recap, the work of anti-wonder among Rifai dervishes in Macedonia exposed facts of production that were obscured by traditionalists (and tend to be black boxed by regnant theories of ritual efficacy and ethical self-cultivation in anthropology of religion). I have argued that, by analogy with performance-based conceptual art that blurs the visceral and the intellectual, the above event-series collapsed on itself and proffered conflicting theories of ritual performance through the acts of performance. By pointing at itself rather than at the intended effects, the above-described ritual series constituted a non-sign, a device for speculation about the nature of ritual performance for the participants themselves. To close, asking of itself whether it depends on meaning, whether it entails representation, whether it permits improvisation and so on, the ritual event-series worked as an intellectual propulsion.

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[i] The term seems appropriate because it does not presume an organic connection between socialism and atheism. It is important to bear in mind multiple entanglements with and divergencies from ‘Western’ history of enlightenment and secularization as well as internal contradictions and specificities of this history in Western and South-eastern Europe.

[ii] I have already discussed the ethno-politics of Islam, including Roma marginality in Macedonia, elsewhere.

[iii] Pettifer argues that the Macedonian Orthodox Church was a creation of the Yugoslav communist regime and its nationalities politics (2008). It was created in and was not recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church.